

Chapter 201: Having Meaning (4)

"The Holy Blue Dragon Velbrok will be resurrected."

I finally told her on the fourth day at the monastery, shortly after lunch.

The saint's private room, a place within the monastery that everyone was reluctant to enter. It was a wide room at the top of the steeple where Saint Clarice prayed while looking up at the open sky.

There was only one day left before the large religious ceremony held at Cledric Monastery.

At that moment, various young nobles—who came as representatives of their well-known Houses across the entire empire—were waiting in their own rooms within the monastery for the ceremony to take place.

Abbess Austin had been repeating her daily routine of going to the shore to wait for them, then bringing them over to the monastery at low tide.

When a Head of House was baptized by the Telos Religious Group, it was customary to send a key member of the House to prove their faithfulness and reaffirm trust.

That was also the case for House Rothstaylor. Tanya was the one who was usually sent to attend the ceremony, but it didn't seem like she had all that many fond memories of it.

Though, it couldn't be helped. The monastery was truly empty. It was a place where even famous nobles had no choice but to sit in a small room, chewing on grass for meals.

Because it was such a place, most of the nobles didn't arrive until the fourth day. With more of them coming in, the atmosphere within the monastery was starting to change. Everyone within the monastery started to change their focus onto the incoming distinguished guests.

Anyway, that was the best time for me to talk to the Saint, as people were paying slightly less attention to her.

“...Pardon?”

"That's what I wanted to tell you."

As I was in charge of checking the saint's meals and assisting her, there were quite a few opportunities to be alone with her during the day.

Something that, at Silvenia Academy, was almost impossible to do.

With her schedule relatively relaxed and the nuns preoccupied with taking care of the visiting

nobles, it was the best time to talk to her.

"There are barely any people I can speak honestly about this with. So... That's the real reason I followed you to Cledric Monastery."

"....."

"I saw the future. The Holy Blue Dragon Velbrok will resurrect without warning. It will then turn Acken Island into a wasteland, causing a catastrophe that will forever remain in the history of the Kroel Empire."

She could tell I wasn't joking.

Hearing what I was calmly telling her, Saint Clarice stopped eating. No, she had probably already finished eating a while ago, but she was still sitting down with me a bit longer so that we could talk.

"I don't doubt what you're saying, but I must ask what basis you have to think that?"

"There is none. That's why I'm not in a position where I can tell this to just anyone."

"....."

"Right now, I'm not in a position where I can unreasonably demand another's unfounded trust. That's why... I came to talk with you. Someone

who experienced fragments of the future that I saw."

On the day of the joint combat training, Saint Clarice and I repeatedly went through time, watching Velbrok's disaster over and over again.

By getting rid of Velbrok's tooth in Zahul's territory, we were able to delay its resurrection a bit... But that didn't change the fact that the sealing spell on Velbrok had already reached its limit.

"I can't stop it on my own. I need the help of people with powerful influence, able to mobilize a large number of people. Saint Clarice... You're someone who can help me in this area."

Normally, someone would respond to me as if I were speaking nonsense. However, since it was Saint Clarice I was talking to, the story was different.

For her, Velbrok's resurrection wasn't impossible to imagine. In fact, she had already seen its massive scales cover the skies of Acken Island over and over again.

"...If what you're saying is true, then we can't sit still."

"We need to gather as many forces as possible. At the very least, we should mobilize all of the elite

imperial soldiers and the apostles of the Telos Religious Group to Acken Island.”

“For something that wide-scale... Even though I’m the saint, it’s not something I can arbitrarily decide.”

Even though she had abruptly had all of it just dropped on her, she still thought things over thoroughly and responded calmly.

“We will have to convince the Holy Father about the threat of Velbrok to be able to fully utilize the power of the Telos Religious Group.”

“That... won’t be easy.”

“With my status as a saint, I can provide some legitimacy if I claim it was foresight or an oracle. However... if things don’t happen as you say, my authority and credibility will certainly be affected.”

Clarice was the saint of the Telos Religious Group, one of the closest listeners to God’s voice.

Although she was praised as being closest to God, her current status would be in jeopardy if she formed an image of someone who had misread an oracle.

It was not an easy thing for her to forewarn of the Holy Blue Dragon’s descent to the entire world. If she was wrong, it wasn’t something that could be easily excused as a mistake.

So, to fully trust in what I told her, even without any proof or basis behind it... Given her position, it was not an easy task.

Even if Clarice herself believed in what I said, having everyone else believe it as well was another issue.

"I figured as much. For you, who is always so busy and treats every second like gold, there had to be a good reason for coming all the way here to the monastery with me."

"....."

"I never thought the main reason you came here was because I requested it. I figured you had a bigger picture or political means to take care of. So, I shouldn't feel too upset about your reasons for coming with me. After all, in my position, these things happen often."

It felt weird to apologize to her now.

Even though Saint Clarice said all of that, she was really just happy to be with me in Cledric Monastery.

"Even though you were worried that putting your trust in me would be unfounded, you don't have to worry about that. Even without any proof, I believe in you. Since you are saying that Velbrok

will return and pose a massive threat, I'm sure that will be the case."

"Saint..."

"However, the issue right now is that I can't give you a certain answer. Just because I trust in you, it doesn't mean I am capable of convincing the entire Telos Religious Group and mobilizing them. However, I will try to do my best."

She was different from when we spoke as friends, discussing our lives or the scenery.

Saint Clarice was always immature, ignorant of the world, and always strangely intoxicated with romance. However... After losing Adele, it felt like she had become much calmer and more rational.

Aside from her personal growth, the situation itself was also severe.

"Since you believed me much more willingly than I expected, I'm quite flustered."

"Being the Saint, there is something that I have come to vaguely learn. When one's drunk on peace, it becomes impossible to deal with sudden tragedy. When times are peaceful... That is when tragedy really strikes."

Clarice had a strange look in her eyes as she spoke with certainty.

"So, please tell me everything else you know, Ed. What is going to happen?"

"It's a long story."

"That's great. It feels like I'm able to lessen some of your burden."

Contrary to my belief that she would be confused, Clarice only smiled softly.

"I'm ready to shoulder it with you."

* * *

Members of the royal family were always the main characters, wherever they went.

That was the case with Princess Selah, who was a main character at the social gathering held at the Rothstaylor Estate, as well as Princess Penia, who received everyone's attention as a new student at Silvenia.

That fact was no different for Princess Persica. In the monastery, young girls from all sorts of different noble families were introduced and exchanged greetings amongst themselves. However, no one could dare talk to Princess Persica.

Members of the royal family always had a noble and dignified image to them. Aside from that,

however, they also had an energy around them—as if it were impossible to speak to them freely.

It wasn't just difficult to approach and talk to Persica, but even her personal escort knight Tune, as well.

So, even when people ran into her in the hallways of the monastery, they just bowed their heads and passed on by.

"Are most of them just holy books or religious books? It seems that the quality of the bookshelves is also difficult to match that of the Imperial Library. Just do it."

Princess Persica was sitting on the floor of a fairly large library, located on the lower level of the monastery.

Several old collections of books were available, but most of the content of those books was already in Princess Persica's head.

She was obsessed with books and knowledge, to the point she was called the ghost of the library.

Knowledge and information were key in the world. If a ruler was ignorant and uninformed, they would never be able to maintain their position for long. That was part of Persica's unwavering values.

That was why Princess Persica always confined herself to the library to concentrate on reading

books whenever she had free time. As soon as she arrived at the monastery, she went right down to the library.

The problem was that it wasn't the time to be reading books.

With the dispute over imperial power intensifying, Emperor Kroel was also gradually feeling burdened.

The easiest way to end the heated dispute would be for him to officially declare a successor.

However, he could not arbitrarily select a successor to lead the great empire. He was surely thinking things over on his own, but many of the aides under him were in great agony waiting for his decision.

He would most likely hold a meeting within the imperial household to carefully examine each of the pillars of support behind the princesses. Upon considering that support alongside his own personal opinions, he would decide on a successor.

What Emperor Kroel valued the most was whether his successor had the ability to take the throne with little complaints, and whether they could continue to lead the heyday of the empire.

To do so, the most important factor was to gain the support of both the internal powers of the imperial family and the outer various influential powers of the empire.

That was the reason she tried to gain control over the Elte Company, one of the main organizations within the business world, as well as the full support of the Imperial Knight Templars.

What was important for her was to receive overwhelmingly more support than her two blood-related sisters, Selah and Penia.

While it was important to gather forces on her side, it was also just as important to check on her opponent's side as well.

After all, wasn't it more efficient to steal from her opponent than to go out of her way to gain her own support?

That was why Princess Persica came all the way to Cledric Monastery under the pretext of attending the ceremony. It was all to persuade Abbess Austin, who currently fully supported Princess Penia.

And her preparations to persuade her... They were complete. It seemed that Abbess Austin would be

incapable of refusing Princess Persica's offer. She had fully investigated who Abbess Austin was and what her temperament was like.

"Hmm..."

The problem was Ed Rothstaylor.

The most infamous person left within House Rothstaylor and one of Princess Penia's key supporters.

If she managed to persuade him as well, she would be able to rid Princess Penia of even more of her support.

"This is quite complicated."

Abbess Austin was treated like the mother of the Telos Religious Group. She was someone who not only received the respect of the nuns, but even the Holy Father himself.

Ed Rothstaylor was an influential member of House Rothstaylor, which stood as the center of controversy within the imperial council.

If she could bring those two to her side, it would definitely be great progress in her race for the throne. Accomplishing that alone could make her trip to the monastery a great success.

The problem was that Persica had very little information regarding Ed.

Selah and Penia had both personally met Ed before. However, to Persica, the man named Ed Rothstaylor was a complete mystery.

He was someone that she could only judge through information and rumors that were passed down. Princess Persica didn't want to personally meet with him without having prior information, so she had tried to collect information about him on her own... However, it wasn't easy.

"Do you think I can persuade him with money?"

"Rumors within the monastery say that he has a hobby of drinking wine at a large golden citadel while looking at vineyards that stretch out to the horizon..."

"Was there a vineyard of that size at the Rothstaylor Estate?"

"I... I do not know... But he doesn't seem to be a person who cares about money. At the very least, he wasn't persuaded with money during the incident with the Elte Company."

Next to Princess Persica, who was seated in a reading room within the monastery's library, was

her personal escort Tune. She was standing next to her with a perplexed expression on her face.

The method of persuading another ultimately boiled down to one of three things.

Money, honor and power, or a sense of justice.

"What if I promise him a higher position once I take over the throne?"

"He has already grown up as a nobleman of House Rothstaylor. I honestly don't believe he will be swayed by more honor and power."

"Is this based on what you know?"

"Rumors within the monastery are that he firmly rejected the prestigious and powerful position of Chief Magic Researcher within the imperial household. He supposedly said that academic research doesn't come through having power and authority."

"...The imperial household never made such a proposal, right?"

"...I am also confused."

"Well, I guess academic research isn't an area managed by the Rose Palace... So there's a chance I just haven't seen the report, but..."

Princess Persica accepted Tune's report with a skeptical expression on her face. Tune's ability to work quickly and collect information was evident in the report she put together shortly after they arrived.

"What even are these rumors? Some of these things don't even fit into the realm of common sense..."

"... I omitted many other rumors from this document as well. There were quite a few things that I thought were completely impossible, so I omitted them from the report."

"For example?"

"That he could turn water into ice with just a glance. Or that he can stop a person's heart with just his voice..."

"....."

"One swing of his dagger will split a wall in half, the ability to handle several high-ranking spirits, connected to various powerful people in Oldek's hidden alleyways, Saint Clarice is completely fascinated by him..."

The scary thing about the rumors Tune was reciting was that some of them contained

fragments of truth.

However, it was difficult to judge what was true and what wasn't because of his strangely hidden background. It was as if a smokescreen was covering Ed, making it difficult to imagine what he was truly like.

"Hiding his true powers, such as being able to cut the entire sea with an arrow or being able to cast advanced magic with just a flick of his finger..."

"Stop... I got it..."

"I'm also not sure what is even true or not..."

To be honest, neither of them thought that all of it was true. It wasn't possible.

Rather, the first thing they thought of was that the nuns, who were full of romance, were completely fascinated by and infatuated with Ed Rothstaylor—to the point that their imaginations ran wild.

...And that was correct.

However, Princess Persica was still left confused about Ed Rothstaylor.

Princess Selah and Princess Penia were both quite obsessed with him. He was one of the few remaining members of House Rothstaylor, and

had endured various major crises that put his life on the line at Silvenia... He was an expert in 'survival' itself.

Ed Rothstaylor had even once thwarted Persica's plan to take over the Elte Company. He even had the full support of Lortel Kehelland, the current deputy director.

He was a person who constantly received surprisingly generous evaluations. The fact that it consistently happened meant that there had to be a reason for it.

So, she thought he would be an extraordinary person, but...

Saying he does this and that... Isn't it all too exaggerated...?

Wasn't there such a thing as a degree to such things?

It was rather strange that such an incredible person hadn't entered Persica's information network yet.

"Then... Wouldn't it be better to try and meet with him once?"

"I can't just attend the ceremony and waste this opportunity. I should make time for him, but... I'm

a little nervous.”

Princess Persica closed the book she was reading as she sighed deeply.

"Well, even though I'm sure those rumors are all nonsense, it's still important to fact check them."

For now, she decided to dismiss the rumors and withhold judgment about Ed Rothstaylor, who was still an imaginary being to her.

Those rumors just couldn't possibly be true.

* * *

"Hello, Young Master Ed. I heard from Abbess Austin that you were here at the monastery. My name is Mary, the second daughter of Count Flosin. The head of our house fully supports Princess Penia and had a special bond with Duke Rothstaylor. I hope that our good relationship will continue."

"Hello, Young Master Ed! Where did King Granny go?! So... I needed my uniform repaired, but... the person in charge seems to be busy! S-So, maybe... W-Would it be alright if I ask you to do it instead...? I-I'm sorry if I've offended you!"

"Young Master Ed. Have you eaten? I heard that high-quality lamb arrived at the monastery today.

The nuns were all heading towards the mess hall as if they were ecstatic."

"Where did Granny Austin go?! I was locked up in my room all last night, so why was I given demerit points?! *Kyaaaah!* A-Ahh... Y-Young Master Ed. You were here..."

"I need to check the status of tomorrow's ceremony, but... The abbess went to her room and isn't answering... S-So, maybe... Could you take care of it instead...? Because you are personally managing the saint's schedule... Y-You can do that, right...?"

I finally came back to my room after dealing with various noble girls approaching me for political reasons, and the nuns who came to talk to me about their daily lives within the monastery.

The sky was already full of stars by the time I closed my door.

A monastery on the outskirts, where nothing else stood.

Since there were barely any light sources, the many stars in the sky were all the more visible and magnificent. It was a bit of a stretch to say, but it looked as if the Milky Way was shining like daylight.

"Whew..."

In a different way from living in the wild, life at the monastery was difficult. I wiped my face as I sat on a shabby wooden chair, looking out the window.

After spending the entire day as the center of attention, I finally had time to sit alone in the dark late at night.

The night sky I looked up at was the same as usual. That fact felt rather comforting.

Things that didn't change over time often provided a strange sense of psychological stability. I started to feel as if I understood why the petite magician, always wearing her massive witch hat, always sat up on a roof and looked up at the sea of stars.

Does that girl also feel strangely comforted like this?

Although I had personally spoken with Lucy many times already, I still didn't feel like I fully understood her.

There were times when she lay down here and there like a stray cat. Then there were times where she started to act mysteriously, flying between

buildings seriously... I could never tell whether she was being serious or lazy. Well, I was sure she was both.

“...This isn’t the time to be thinking about this.”

Tomorrow was the long-awaited ceremony. Princess Persica, who was currently resting in her assigned room somewhere in the monastery, would also attend the ceremony. It would be our first meeting.

Mornings at the monastery always started early, so I needed to head to bed quickly in order to be able to face Princess Persica in my normal condition.

Wanting to get some sleep, I quickly lifted the blanket.

And as if it were her own, Lucy was sleeping on my bed.

“.....”

I thought I had heard a strange breathing noise, but it looked like it wasn't an auditory hallucination.

Lucy Mayreel, who was holding onto my pillow while asleep, was completely glued to my bed with a satisfied expression on her face.

Why was she even there? Even before I could ask, Lucy opened her eyes. She looked around blankly, as if she felt empty now that I had taken the blanket from her.

As she looked back at me, she started to sweat.

"Ah, hi."

"Why are you here...?"

Was she awake?

Lucy raised her upper body, shriveled up, and lowered her gaze.

"I-I was taking a walk and... somehow..."

"....."

It seemed like she had been hiding in the monastery. I didn't even need to think all that hard to realize the rumors of the ghost within the monastery were actually just the girl in front of me.

It looked like she fell asleep after trying to lie in bed for a bit. I knew it.

"Now that I'm done with my walk, I should head back to Ophelis Hall. Bell is going to be mad at me. So... I'll be off..."

"...Just be honest with me."

"I followed you in the carriage. I just... wanted to come to the monastery."

As I stared back at her in disbelief, Lucy finally confessed everything.

"I heard a story from Old Man Gloekt before..."

That... She was saying something that she didn't mention back at Acken Island. Up until that point, I couldn't figure out why she wanted to come with me to the monastery.

Lucy twirled her white hair with her fingertips as she struggled to speak.

"He told me he came to visit this monastery before. I remember him telling me how beautiful, majestic, and memorable it was... I wanted to see it just once."

Lucy didn't usually talk much about herself.

Even after arriving at the monastery, she stayed hidden as she went around looking at the monastery.

Playing on the roof of the large monastery, wandering around the basement, and looking at all of the different facilities... Did some people manage to spot her after all? It made sense with the rumors of the ghost... It was true that the rumors of the ghost were Lucy, I supposed.

"But then I got caught by the abbess."

"Of course... How long did you think you could keep hiding? "

"Is it because she's old? She was quite close with that old man... She started to talk to me about him quite a bit."

I sat on a wooden chair as I quietly listened to Lucy's story.

Sitting on my bed, holding the pillow tight... Lucy continued to speak, starting to look strangely different.

"Actually, it seemed that she was just ignoring the fact that I was walking around the monastery.

After talking to her, I realized she's a more understanding person than I thought."

"Yeah. Even at a glance you can tell that she's a bubbly and bright person."

"Yeah, so... We sat side by side on the roof of the monastery as we looked at the stars and talked. She is someone I get along with better than I thought... She listened to all of my worries."

"Worries?"

Worries that the girl who was always sleeping comfortably, regardless of the situation, had.

Lucy let out a sigh as she held the pillow tightly.

That look on her face... Rather than a sense of embarrassment, she looked rather sad.

"...What did you talk about with Abbess Austin?"

"...It's a secret."

"...Alright. There's no reason for me to dig any deeper."

I had no idea she had followed me to the monastery, but it seemed that she was having fun quietly walking around on her own.

Well, she wasn't causing any harm, so it wasn't that big of a deal. Though, did Lucy have something she wanted to say...? She continued to have a worried expression on her face.

"You know..."

After the ceremony that was scheduled for the next day, we would return to Acken Island.

When we went back, she should ride in the carriage with me instead of in the luggage compartment. While I had that thought...

"What is a meaningful life?"

Hearing Lucy suddenly bringing up a philosophical thought was a strange thing to hear. What was she trying to say?

Of course, I couldn't give her a clear answer, so I spoke from the bottom of my heart.

"I don't know, either."

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Anyway, I'm going back to Acken Island after the ceremony tomorrow... Don't go and hide in the luggage compartment again. Though, I guess there

aren't enough seats in the carriage... Well, I'm sure it would still be more comfortable on my lap than in the luggage compartment.”

After saying that, I checked the schedule for the next day.

After I finished things, I needed to return to Acken Island. There was a lot of work left to do when I got back.

Even though there were still quite a few things to take care of, I thought I could somehow take care of it all before going back to Acken Island.

Of course, things don't always go as expected.

Still, there was a degree to a sudden change of circumstances.

The next morning, Austin, an elder of the Telos Religious Group and the Abbess of Cledric Monastery for decades...

Was found dead in her room only a few hours before the ceremony was to be held.